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SUBJECT: IVLP ALUM MEET IN FRANCE

¶1. Summary: Alumni from the 2003 European biotech and food safety group of the International Visitor Leadership Program (IVLP) met June 10-12 in Toulouse, France to continue their review of agricultural biotech issues. Representatives from FAS/Paris and the American Presence Post in Toulouse consulate updated the group on U.S. biotech developments since 2003 and facilitated their interaction with French biotech stakeholders. End Summary.

¶2. Since 2003, the group has met in Copenhagen (Sept 2004) and Tallinn, Estonia (May 2006) in an effort to continue their examination of biotech and food safety issues. This time, the group, composed of Delphine Guey, communication director of the French planting seed organization, GNIS; Jan O.F. Lausten, Deputy Director General, Danish Agricultural Council; Reili Kivilo, Chief Inspector, Consumer Protection Board of Estonia; Jonathan Leake, Science and Environment Director, London "The Sunday Times," Odd Anders Nilsen, Norwegian lawyer; and Hans van Dongen, Department of Food Quality and Animal Health, Dutch Ministry of Agriculture, Nature and Food Quality, met with French biotech companies and farmers in southern France.

¶3. The Agriculture Attache and Agriculture Economist from FAS/Paris and the Consul from the American Presence Post in Toulouse joined the group and briefed it on current U.S. developments in agriculture biotechnology. GNIS reps presented the latest developments in the French agriculture biotech sector in terms of research, development and production.

¶4. Afterwards, the group visited the headquarters and facilities of Syngenta and Pioneer, biotech seed companies, where it received additional briefings on the economic impacts of issues such as the EU's lengthy GMO approvals process; and the impact that the lack of an EU standard for the adventitious presence of biotech in planting seeds is having on players in the French biotech sector. For example, Syngenta's Bt11 corn, submitted in France in 1996 and approved by the European Food Safety Agency (EFSA) in 2006, and Pioneer's 1507 corn, submitted for approval in Spain in 2001 and approved by EFSA in 2006 are both still waiting final approval at the European level.

¶5. The group also visited two farming operations, one organic and

one biotech, where discussions centered on coexistence issues and the expansion of Bt corn acreage in 2007 (20,000 ha) from 2006 (5,200 ha). According to the farmers, the strong increase resulted from several factors: reduced pesticide costs, higher yields, and lower mycotoxin levels of the 2006 biotech corn crop. In addition, as more companies licensed Monsanto's Mon810, the only event authorized for cultivation in France since 1998, to produce their own biotech corn seeds, French farmers also had a wider variety of biotech seeds to choose from this year.

17. Delphine Guey, the French IVLP participant and organizer of this meeting, has developed, since her trip to the United States, into a solid ally in favor of agricultural biotechnology, and advocates its benefits to a host of French agricultural stakeholders. Also, London's Sunday Times published an article on July 1 written by the British IVLP participant titled "Europe set to lift ban on GM crops." The article mentioned the considerable activity on the part of the U.S. government to persuade European authorities to deploy greater biotech resources.

18. The group plans to meet again in 2008 in the United Kingdom. This Embassy will continue to support the group's ongoing examination of biotech issues and encourage its positive influence in France.

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